



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Erie National Wildlife Refuge

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INSIDE *Erie*



Photo by: Michael Noonan

Erie NWR provides nesting habitat for Cerulean warblers. These neotropical migrants are in jeopardy due to loss of habitat in both their summer and winter homes.

Refuge Focuses on Species of Concern

The cerulean warbler, one of the most imperiled neotropical songbirds, nests in the upper canopy of mature hardwood forests of the Northeast and Midwestern United States, including some of Erie National Wildlife Refuge's forests. This four-inch-long bird weighs less than half an ounce, but it migrates thousands of miles from its North American breeding grounds to winter in the evergreen forests of the South American Andes Mountains.

The warbler has dramatically declined as both its summer and winter habitats are fragmented and destroyed for development and agricultural use. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a continental partnership between governments and private organizations to protect birds in a coordinated, scientific way, ranks the warbler as a continental priority and its highest level of conservation concern.

The American woodcock, which also nests on the refuge and migrates through, is so well camouflaged it is very difficult to spot hunkered down in the grass and brush. During mating season, the male comes out of hiding at dusk to attract a mate with aerial displays, during which it dives and zigzags from high in the air. NABCI ranks the species as a high regional conservation priority.

(story continued on page 3)

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Update

In the last issue of INSIDErie, we highlighted our work on a proposal to allow us to develop a Land Protection Plan. That proposal has been submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service Director for approval. While we wait for that project to move forward, we continue to make progress on writing chapters of our Comprehensive Conservation Plan. That plan has a long way to go, but progress is being made.



In the meantime, work goes on at the refuge. Our busy field season is upon us.

Summer interns and temporary employees will be on board to help with invasive plant monitoring and mapping, CCP research, the Heritage Fest, outreach activities, an interpretive trail guide, new teacher resource kits, and general maintenance tasks.

The Youth Conservation Corps group of 10 teens and their two leaders will work primarily on enhancing Visitor Services facilities. They will improve the condition of trails, enhance signage, improve accessibility for those with mobility challenges, assist with the Heritage Fest, rehabilitate the photo blind, and other maintenance tasks. While these young people learn about the environment, and refuge management, just as importantly, they will learn critical life lessons about work and a work ethic.

Stay tuned! There will be much to report!

Youth Conservation Corps enrollees install boundary signs marking a corner of the refuge (2009).

Highlighting Refuge's Nature Explorer Program

This summer, spend some time discovering Erie National Wildlife Refuge. Complete 10 tasks from the program and earn a certificate and gorgeous embroidered patch!



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Species of Concern... (cont.)

Identifying Priority Species

The cerulean warbler and American woodcock are two of many species that refuge staff take into consideration when making habitat management decisions. “Species of concern” on the refuge are those whose conservation is a priority in Pennsylvania, nationally or even continent-wide that can benefit from habitat the refuge provides.

The refuge identifies species of concern using a variety of sources including:

- federally-listed threatened and endangered species,
- state Wildlife Conservation Plans,
- state Natural Heritage Program rankings,
- state listed threatened and endangered species,
- and international, national and regional bird conservation plans.

The founding purposes of the refuge and the Fish and Wildlife Service’s federal obligation to protect migratory birds, fish, and other trust species are also a key guide to the refuge’s priorities. Since Erie National Wildlife Refuge was founded to protect migratory birds, NABCI’s regional list of birds of conservation concern is a very helpful tool.

In 1998, NABCI prioritized and combined four continental conservation plans for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds and landbirds into one master plan for bird conservation. The plan also delineated Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) across the continent with similar bird communi-



Photo by: Michael Noonan

Hooded mergansers use similar habitat to that used by wood ducks, a focal species for refuge management activities.

ties, habitats, and resource management concerns. Each region has a distinct list of birds of concern that integrate the national and continental bird conservation priorities. Located in the glaciated Appalachian Plateau, Erie provides habitat for waterbirds associated with BCR 13 and landbirds of conservation concern in both BCR 13 and 28.

Focal Species

While there may be dozens of species of concern on a National Wildlife Refuge, it would take enormous resources to track each and every one. Instead the staff identifies key focal species to monitor.

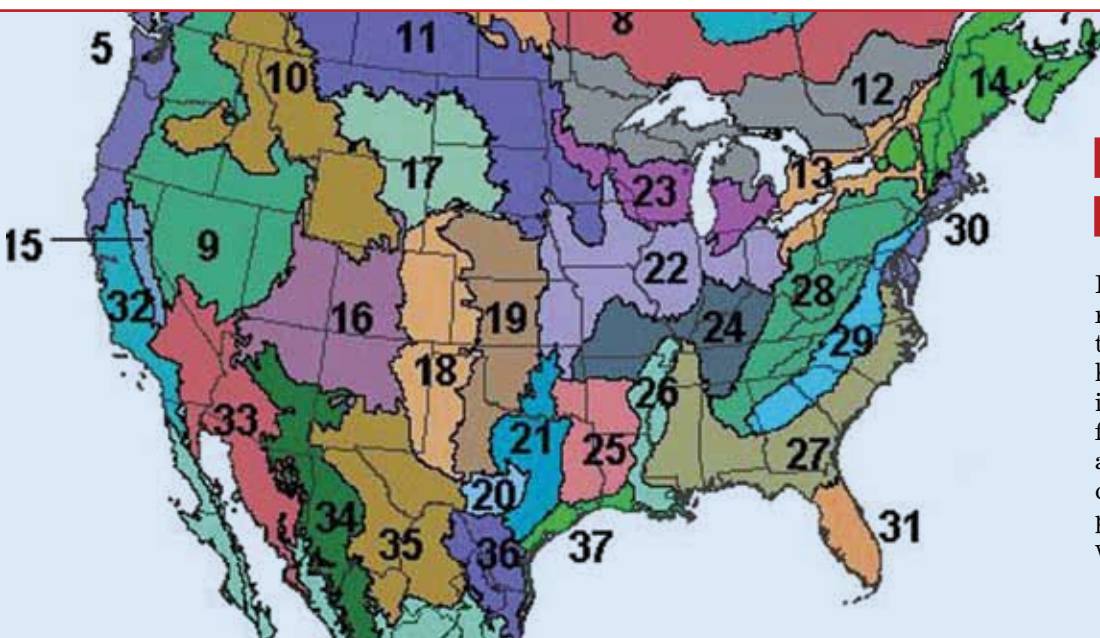
Different focal species, “may represent guilds of species that are highly associated with important attributes or conditions within habitat types,” says Refuge Biologist Norma Kline. For example, Erie’s wet meadow habitats are used by 75 percent of Pennsylvania’s

known breeding sedge wrens, a focal species on the refuge. The same habitat benefits other species of concern like the northern harrier and bobolink, Kline explains.

The wood duck and cerulean warbler are focal species in the refuge’s riparian forests, and other species like the hooded merganser, Louisiana waterthrush and Baltimore oriole rely on this habitat.

Managing for the Big Picture

While many common species benefit from habitat on the refuge, the refuge manages habitat first and foremost for species of concern. With limited land and resources, “we can’t be a refuge to all species, and we shouldn’t even try,” Roster says. “We focus on priority species that are appropriate to our region and the refuge’s habitat. We’re one little piece of the bigger picture.”



Bird Conservation Regions

Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) reflect current understanding of areas that have similar bird communities, habitats, and resource management issues. BCRs were designed to facilitate communication, partnerships, and a coordinated approach to bird conservation issues. Erie NWR provides habitat for birds associated with BCRs 13 and 28.



Guys Mills Heritage Fest

Free and open to the public

**All about Guys Mills, there will be activities,
crafts, food, and fun for all ages!**

Join us!

Saturday, June 26, 2010 | 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.